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LBJ'S Position Unknown

'Great Decision' Felt Near on Viet-Nam

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With the election over and the situation in South Viet-Nam not noticeably improving—and very probably continuing to worsen—the assumption in Washington has been that now is the time for Great Decision.

President Johnson began discussing foreign policy with Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the LBJ Ranch in Texas last week. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, U.S. Ambassador to South Viet-Nam, is expected back in Washington by Christmas for personal consultations with the President.

The President's advisers, from McGeorge Bundy on down, all have been busy lately analyzing future alternatives to U.S. policy.

The extremes of choice are obvious:

- Should the United States now sanction a "Go North" movement involving an attack on Communist North Viet-Nam by air, sea or ground, or all three?

- Or should the United States come to the unhappy decision that further help for South Viet-Nam is futile? That American losses now should be cut in order to enable a concentration on the more defensible U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia?

The President's views on foreign policy in general, and on South Viet-Nam in particular, reportedly are unknown to his policy makers. All they do know from him is that he wants a free hand to make up his mind on what to do about South Viet-Nam after hearing all the arguments.

The only hint of presidential thinking the policy makers can cite are the extemporaneous remarks Mr. Johnson appended to a speech he made in the grand ballroom of the Carpenter Motor Inn in Manchester, N.H. on Sept. 28, during the election cam-

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how you are going to protect what you have.

"When a Brigadier General can walk down the street of Saigon, as they did the other day (in the abortive coup of mid-September) and take over the police station, the radio station and the government without firing a shot. I don't know how much offensive we are prepared to launch. As far as I am concerned, I want to be very cautious and careful, and use it only as a last resort when I start dropping bombs around that are likely to involve American boys in a war in Asia with 700 million Chinese . . .

"So we are not going North and we are not going South; we are going to continue to try to get them to save their own freedom with their own men, with our leadership and our officer direction, and such equipment as we can furnish them.

"We think that losing 190 lives in the period that we have been out there is bad. But it is not like 190,000 that we might lose the first month if we escalated that war.

"So we are trying somehow to evolve a way, as we have in some other places, where the North Vietnamese and the Chinese Communists finally, after getting worn down, conclude that they will leave their neighbors alone. And if they do, we will come home tomorrow," the President told his New Hampshire audience.

The President's words certainly breathed caution. But they were spoken in September in an election campaign where Mr. Johnson was anxious to differentiate himself from the "warmonger" cries made against his opponent, Sen. Barry Goldwater.

Whether the President's views on South Viet-Nam are unchanged, two months later with the election over, remains to be seen.

But to date, the Manchester speech is the only hint of Mr. Johnson's views available.

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These are the relevant words:

"Some of our people—Mr. Nixon, Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Scranton and Mr. Goldwater — have all, at some time or other, suggested the possible wisdom of going North in Viet-Nam. Well, now, before you start attacking someone and you launch a big offensive, you better give some consideration to